



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 22, 2015

Contact: Laurel Riek, Environmental Health Specialist, 406-447-8361
Gayle Shirley, Communications Manager, 406-457-8908

Rabid Bat Found at Picnic Area North of Helena

A bat found Sunday, Sept. 13, at Meriwether Picnic Area about 20 miles north of Helena has tested positive for rabies, local health officials announced today.

The bat was discovered on the trail near the boat dock at the popular picnic area on the Missouri River. Meriwether Canyon Trail leads into the Gates of the Mountain Wilderness Area.

“Anyone who had direct contact with a bat needs to be evaluated for potential exposure to rabies,” said Laurel Riek, environmental health specialist with Lewis and Clark Public Health.

Anyone who was at Meriwether Picnic Area the weekend of Sept. 12-13 and who had direct contact with a bat should call Riek at 447-8361. People who had no direct contact with a bat are not at risk, she said.

Direct contact includes being bitten or scratched by a bat or getting bat saliva in the eyes, nose, mouth, or an open break in the skin. There is a reasonable probability of exposure if:

- A child is found handling a bat or reports that they handled a bat.
- An adult sees a bat fly near a child and the child reports that “it hit me.”
- A person steps on a bat with bare feet.
- A bat flies into someone and touches bare skin.
- A person sleeps out in the open where a rabid bat has been found.

There is little probability of exposure when:

- Touching fur, wings, or legs of a live bat while looking at it.
- Touching something that a bat has touched.
- A bat brushes past someone, but they’re certain no contact occurred.

Rabies is transmitted through infected saliva via a bite, scratch, or other break in the skin. The disease is almost always fatal if untreated. Treatment involves a series of vaccinations that should begin as soon as possible after exposure.

“Bat bites are small and not always easy to detect,” Riek said. “Visitors may have to consider rabies treatment if there’s a reasonable probability of exposure. Parents should ask their children if they touched or played with a bat while they were there.”

She strongly recommended that people avoid touching any wild animal.

Here are some ways to protect yourself and your family from being exposed to rabies:

- Never touch a bat. Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.
- Keep wild animals out of your home. Secure doors and windows, cap chimneys with screens, and close off any openings in porches, basements, and attics.
- Make sure your pets are current on their rabies shots. An unvaccinated pet that’s exposed to a rabid animal could become a threat to your family.
- Confine your animals to your property. Pets that are allowed to roam are at higher risk for rabies exposure and infection.

For more information on bats and rabies, visit Lewis and Clark Public Health at www.LewisAndClarkHealth.org. A brochure on the topic is located under About Us, Publications.